

This is **G o o g l e's** [cache](#) of <http://www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Baha'i.htm> as retrieved on Dec 17, 2004 00:52:13 GMT.

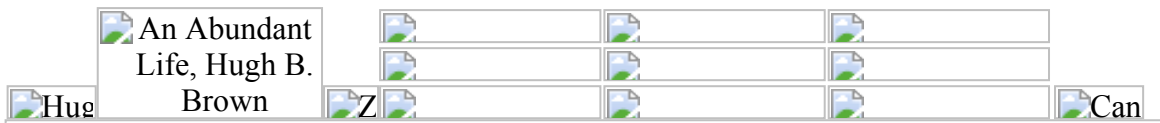
G o o g l e's cache is the snapshot that we took of the page as we crawled the web. The page may have changed since that time. Click here for the [current page](#) without highlighting.

This cached page may reference images which are no longer available. Click here for the [cached text](#) only.

To link to or bookmark this page, use the following url: <http://www.google.com/search?q=cache:RwVFY-yCetEJ:www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Baha'i.htm++i+baha'i+by+Margit+Warburg&hl=en&client=firefox-a>

Google is not affiliated with the authors of this page nor responsible for its content.

These search terms have been highlighted: **baha i margit warburg**



Excerpt

return to book page

Baha'i
(Studies in Contemporary Religion)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. The Baha'is 1**
- 2. The Emergence and Historical Development of the Baha'i Religion 5**
 - The Declaration of the Bab**
 - The Rise of the Babi Movement**
 - The Collapse of the Babi Movement**
 - Exile in Baghdad and the Declaration of Baha'u'llah**
 - The Development of the Baha'i Religion under Baha'u'llah**
 - Abdu'l-Baha and Expansion in the West**
 - Shoghi Effendi and the Routinization of Leadership**
 - Establishment of the Universal House of Justice**
- Photographs**
- 3. Baha'i Beliefs and Rituals.....23**
 - Fundamental Doctrines**
 - The Baha'i Year**
 - Baha'i Festivals**
 - Rituals**
 - Prayer*
 - Fast*
 - Collective Rites*
 - Pilgrimage*
 - Baha'i Symbols*
 - Economic Rituals*
 - Huququ'llah*
- 4. Baha'is in the World 43**
 - The Number and Distribution of Baha'is Worldwide**
 - Baha'i Temples**

| | |
|--|-----------|
| The Shrine of the Bab and the Baha'i World Centre | |
| <i>The Symbolism of the Shrine of the Bab</i> | |
| <i>The Administrative Buildings of the Baha'i World Centre</i> | |
| <i>The Special Position of the World Centre</i> | |
| Baha'i Mission Strategies | |
| <i>Missionaries</i> | |
| <i>Missions at International Events</i> | |
| <i>Firesides</i> | |
| Social Development Projects | |
| Working through International Organizations | |
| 5. <u>Schism, Opposition, and Persecution</u> | 63 |
| Schisms Since the Bab | |
| Internal Disputes and Opposition | |
| Persecutions | |
| Najis and Rumors of Immorality | |
| Notes | 77 |
| Bibliographic Note | 89 |

5.

SCHISM, OPPOSITION, AND PERSECUTION

The Babi movement represented a radical trend among the Shi'ites. The Bab's break with Shi'i Islam in 1848 was a major schism, the wounds of which have never healed. Like other radical movements, Babism and Baha'i later went through several schisms which in turn gave birth to splinter groups in fierce opposition to mainstream Baha'i. Seen from a Muslim perspective, the Baha'is themselves are a splinter group based on a heretical doctrine, namely, the claim that there was a prophet after Muhammad.

Schisms Since the Bab

In the period after the Bab's execution in 1850, the Babi movement began to disintegrate under Subh-i-Azal's leadership. Several other Babis stepped forward to claim competing spiritual authority, some declaring themselves to be the prophet promised by the Bab, "him whom God shall make manifest."¹ But none of these contenders was able to gain substantial acceptance and the majority continued to acknowledge the leadership of Subh-i-Azal.

A more serious schism occurred in 1866 when Baha'u'llah claimed that he was "him whom God shall make manifest," implying that Subh-i-Azal should pay allegiance to him. The majority of the Babis accepted Baha'u'llah's claim, and the Azalis were reduced to a conservative minority group. Subh-i-Azal and his family were exiled to Cyprus, where he remained to his death in 1912. He made no attempt to organize a religious community in Famagusta, and the local population simply regarded him as a Muslim holy man.² The Azalis in Iran were soon outnumbered by Baha'is and their influence waned, although some of them played a role in the constitutional revolution of 1905. When Subh-i-Azal died, he was given a Turkish Muslim funeral, confirming that the Azali community in Cyprus no longer existed as an organized body.³

A small shrine adorns Subh-i-Azal's grave on the outskirts of Famagusta, Cyprus. I visited it in February 1996 and found that a grandson of Subh-i-Azal, then an old man of eighty-six years, was acting as the caretaker of the rather neglected shrine. A local Baha'i told me that in the 1960s, they received a visit from a wealthy Iranian woman who flew to the island and claimed to be a relative of the deceased. It was she who arranged for the shrine.

The next schism came when Abdu'l-Baha was challenged by his half-brother Muhammad-Ali, whose followers had considerable influence in the Akko area. The opposition was strengthened when the successful missionary to the United States, Ibrahim Kheiralla, broke from Abdu'l-Baha and most of the American Baha'is in 1900. Kheiralla organized his followers as

"Behaists" and joined forces with Muhammad-Ali. The group does not exist anymore. In the Akko area, the followers of Muhammad-Ali have been reduced to six families who have no common organized religious activities.⁴

Shoghi Effendi's leadership was challenged by family members, and in the process of gaining control over the Baha'i community, he excommunicated virtually all of Baha'u'llah's descendants, as discussed in chapter 2.⁵ Apparently none of the descendants tried to organize a competing group of Baha'is. A cousin of Shoghi Effendi, Ruhi Afnan, published two books after he was excommunicated, but the contents were compatible with established Baha'i concepts.⁶ In the 1920s, the American Baha'i Ruth White opposed Shoghi Effendi and his Administrative Order. She became convinced that Abdu'l-Baha's will had been forged in a conspiracy between Muhammad-Ali and Shoghi Effendi, the former having been the one in effective control.⁷ White won acceptance among some German Baha'is, and after World War II, her ideas continued in Germany through Hermann Zimmer, founder of the World Union for Universal Religion and Universal Peace.⁸ His group has been a rallying point for "Free Baha'is" around the world ever since. Their number is uncertain but probably not more than a few hundred.

A more recent proponent of White's and Zimmer's refutation of the disputed will is Francesco Ficicchia who wrote a monograph in 1981 on the historical development of Baha'i and its institutions.⁹ Written in German, the book seems to have gained some acceptance as a standard work in German-speaking countries. It spurred three Baha'i apologists to write a critical review of 685 pages which, if anything, demonstrated the sensitivity among Baha'is to the issue of opposition to the leadership.¹⁰

In the late 1920s, Ahmad Sohrab, Abdu'l-Baha's former secretary and interpreter, broke with the New York Baha'is when he and Julie Chanler formed the New History Society and, in 1939, opened their own Baha'i bookshop.¹¹ Shoghi Effendi brought suit against them to prevent them from using the word Baha'i. However, courts ruled that no group of believers can monopolize the name of a religion.¹²

Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, and the leadership of Baha'i was assumed by a self-appointed council of nine men called "the Custodians." One of them, Charles Mason Remey, declared in 1960 that he was the Guardian of Orthodox Baha'is. His group became known as "Baha'is under the Hereditary Guardianship." Even before Remey's death in 1974, his followers had begun to split into smaller groups, the largest of which was led by Joel B. Marangella (1918-) who claimed that Remey had appointed him to be the third guardian. On 25 August 1980, I interviewed Marangella's son, Joel Jani Marangella (1947-), and it was evident from the interview that Orthodox Baha'is was an organization that lacked any communal religious life. Another Remeyite group, "Baha'is under the Provisions of the Covenant," was founded by Leland Jensen (1913-1996) in Montana. Jensen prophesied that a nuclear attack would be launched on 29 April 1980 that would annihilate one-third of humankind. Before and after that date, three researchers conducted interviews with Jensen's followers in order to gauge their reactions to failed prophecy.¹³

In Indonesia in 1962 or 1963, Jamshid Maani of Iran declared himself to be the next manifestation of God after Baha'u'llah, calling himself "the Man," leader of "Faith in God."¹⁴ An American Baha'i, John Carre, became the spokesperson for the Man and organized the American followers as the "House of Mankind." But in the 1970s Carre disassociated from the Man, and soon thereafter the movement ceased to exist.¹⁵

Internal Disputes and Opposition

Since the mid-1970s the study of Babism and Baha'i has grown considerably. Most scholars in this field are Baha'is or former Baha'is. Their academic activities have now and then led to internal disputes concerning the issue of academic freedom. At the core of the disputes is the practice laid down by Shoghi Effendi that any Baha'i writing on a religious topic must submit his or her material for approval before it is published.¹⁶ This not only applies to inspirational literature but also to academic works.

The background for the review policy was summarized in a letter from the Universal House of Justice to a group of young Baha'is who in 1978 were discussing ethics in scholarship:

The principle of the harmony of science and religion means not only that religious teachings should be studied with the light of reason and evidence as well as of faith and inspiration, but also that everything in this creation, all aspects of human life and knowledge, should be studied in the light of revelation as well as that of purely rational investigation.¹⁷

In other words, the Universal House of Justice took a clear position in the conflict between academic freedom and acceptance of religious premises: the former must yield to the latter. In a reminder of the policy in 1993, the Universal House of Justice reiterated the same position.¹⁸ It is hardly surprising that this policy has led to internal disputes and that these have occasionally surfaced in academic journals.¹⁹ In principle, the core tension between doctrinal faith and academic freedom scholars may face from any religion, whether or not the leadership has adopted a pre-publication review policy.

The internet has provided another forum for scholarly discussion, which is not subject to prepublication review. However, Baha'i officials have monitored Baha'i discussion groups on the internet and have reprimanded those who have aired complaints or circulated letters of petition.²⁰ As a result, some of the participants have resigned their membership. Others have decided to keep a low profile.

It is obvious that the leadership runs the risk of bad publicity with a policy that violates scholarly standards. However, the critics are very few and isolated and do not represent an organized or united front, so the sensitivity toward internal critique seems out of proportion to any potential threat. It might be partly explained as fear that another schism could emerge, fueled by a liberal critique. As history has thus far shown, Baha'is have succeeded in maintaining a monolithic organization through resolute excommunications and isolation of the opposition.

Persecutions

Since the time of the Babi fights of 1848-1853, Baha'is have suffered from a strained relationship with the Muslim majority in Iran. During some periods, overt persecution has been unleashed upon the Baha'is, while at other times the situation has been more relaxed and the Baha'is have been more-or-less tolerated, in particular during the regime of the last shah. Baha'is tend to be better educated than the average Iranian, and under the last shah, many of them were employed in education and health care or were even appointed to high government posts.

The Islamacist and Babi scholar Denis MacEoin predicts that the tension created by the Baha'i view of messianic Shi'ism will continue.²¹ Baha'is envision a new world unified under one religion in line with Shi'ite eschatology. The difference is that Baha'is are ready to create that new world now because the redeemer, the Imam returned in the person of the Bab, has already made his appearance. It is a position that Shi'ites cannot accept because the return of the Imam implies the end of Islam. MacEoin points out that in the eyes of the ulama, Baha'i also represents concepts of modernity such as equality of the sexes that run counter to the traditions the ulama attempted to restore in the 1979 revolution.²²

The situation for Iranian Baha'is turned worse than ever in the wake of the revolution.²³ The constitution of the new Islamic Republic of Iran distinguished—as the earlier constitution did—between "religions of the book" and other religions. Besides Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians were considered members of legally recognized religions, while Baha'is—the largest religious minority with approximately 300,000 members in Iran—were excluded. This legal exclusion, mirroring the infamous Nurnberg laws of 1935 Germany, by relegating Baha'is to the second-class status of "unprotected infidels," with all the consequences that may imply, provided the basis for denying them civil rights. Most of the laws depriving Baha'is of civil and human rights were already in place before the revolution but were not in use. It is interesting but

sad to see the lengths to which dictatorial governments will search for even the thinnest legal justification to harass an unwanted minority.

One efficient way to persecute a minority group is to deprive them of education and employment, and several steps were taken in this direction as summarized below:

- In 1979 a decree was issued barring Baha'i students and professors from studying or teaching at Iranian universities.
- In 1979 the government began a systematic dismissal of Baha'i civil servants.
- That same year the Ministry of Education dismissed all Baha'i teachers.
- Early in the 1980s the trading licenses of Baha'i businesses were revoked, the assets of Baha'i businesses confiscated, and bank accounts of most Baha'i businessmen frozen.
- Baha'i farmers were denied admission to the farmers' cooperatives.
- By 1982 practically all Baha'i public servants were out of work. In addition, their pensions had been rescinded.
- In 1984 former Baha'i civil servants were told to repay in full their salaries from the entire course of their careers.

Through arbitrary confiscation, looting, and destruction of property beginning in 1979, the Baha'i economy was ruined:

- In March 1979 the historic residence of the Bab in Shiraz was confiscated and given to a Muslim cleric. In September a group led by mullahs and officials of the Department of Religious Affairs destroyed the house. Since then, other Baha'i sites have been destroyed.
- Baha'i cemeteries were bulldozed and the graves dug up.
- Thousands of private Baha'i homes were confiscated.
- Baha'i community properties were transferred to the state.
- A major Baha'i savings company with 15,000 shareholders and investors was assumed by the government.

Bloody persecutions have occurred on a less wide scale but with more severe consequences. Since the revolution, almost 1,000 Baha'is have been placed in prison, with or without a trial, where they have been beaten, whipped, had their fingernails and teeth extracted, and have been forced to witness the torture of family members and friends. Many have reported pressure to recant their faith and convert to Islam. This would seem to demonstrate beyond doubt that they have been persecuted because of religious beliefs.

The charges range from apostasy and heresy to holding unauthorized meetings for youth, holding meetings in private houses, organizing children's art exhibits, Zionism, and the sexual crimes of prostitution, adultery, and immorality. The charges of Zionism and of being an imperialist agent and spy stem from the fact that the Baha'i World Centre is located within the borders of Israel. When Baha'is go on pilgrimage, it is to Israel, and when they send money, it is to the Baha'i World Centre in Israel. I was told by an Iranian woman that whenever a news report mentions the arrest of a Zionist spy, everyone in Iran knows that this means a member of the Baha'i religion. The accusation is made so often that "Baha'i" and "Zionist agent" have become synonymous.

The charges of immorality and adultery are founded in the fact that until recently Iran did not recognize Baha'i marriages. This meant that Baha'i children, by strict definition, were illegitimate. The lack of recognition implied that Baha'is who were imprisoned did not have the right to receive visits from spouses and that a husband or wife could not claim the body of a deceased spouse. Baha'i marriages are still not recognized, but the Iranian courts have since allowed couples to register their marriage without identifying their religious affiliation. This is an important first step toward a possibly more relaxed ambiance for the Baha'is.

Since 1979 more than two hundred Baha'is have been executed or killed in prison. Most often the sentencing has resulted from a summary mock trial, if a prisoner is tried at all. Fifteen additional Baha'is have disappeared and are presumed to be dead. It is a noteworthy token of the destructive strategy of the Iranian regime that half of the executed Baha'is were members of local and national spiritual assemblies. However, any kind of Baha'i activity can be reason for

execution. In June 1983 ten Baha'i women, including two teenage girls, were hanged for holding children's classes for Baha'i youth.

As can be seen from the chart on page 72, the executions reached a peak in the early 1980s. Most observers feel that appeals from international organizations and the news media had a dampening effect on the regime. All eighteen resolutions of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights regarding Iran have condemned the deprivations against Baha'is. Since 1985 the U.N. General Assembly has approved thirteen resolutions denouncing Iran for human rights violations, but the killings have not entirely stopped, as seen from the chart.

Najis and Rumors of Immorality

The stated reasons for actions against the Baha'is are many and varied. However, persecution would not be orchestrated by the government if there were not popular sympathy for it. I interviewed a number of Iranian Baha'is in the autumn of 1982 to learn more about how they are perceived by the greater population. The following are examples.

Central to Shi'i Islam is a concept known as "najis," which means religiously unclean.²⁴ Most Iranians know little more about Baha'is than that the Baha'i prophet came after Muhammad, which makes the adherents heretics and najis. There are other minorities who are najis: Jews, for example. Animals can be najis: pigs are, of course, while a cow is not. As is known from other cultures, that which is unclean is contagious and it is therefore important to avoid contact with whatever is infected. For instance, it might be dangerous to accept tea in a Baha'i home. In fact, some Iranians believe that when Baha'is serve tea, it is the means to make unsuspecting victims accept their faith.

An Iranian refugee told me about a mullah who confiscated the apartment of a wealthy Baha'i family. Before the mullah entered the dwelling, even before he had the furniture and carpets removed, he took a garden hose and sprayed down the inside to make sure that everything was clean. In his mind, the apartment and everything in it were najis. A young girl told a similar story. During the war with Iraq, students in her school were encouraged to donate blood. Her teacher informed her that she was an exception and that her unclean blood was of no use to the soldiers.

It should be stressed that many Muslim Iranians ridicule the concept of najis, saying it is believed only by peasants. However, the incidents cited above demonstrate how widespread the belief is, even within a middle-class setting. Najis explains why Baha'is have been excluded from medical and teaching professions in particular.

Some Muslim Iranians believe that Baha'is live immoral lives, perhaps because of the Baha'i principle that men and women must have the same possibilities and rights. Unlike the tradition of the mosque where men and women are segregated, Baha'i men and women sit together at religious gatherings. Baha'i women tended not to wear the chador before the revolution, and this was seen by orthodox clergy and many common citizens as an affront to morality.

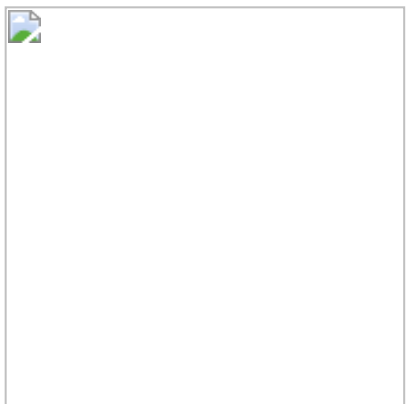
This has indeed given rise to many fanciful rumors in Iran. One is that Baha'i fathers and daughters indulge in sexual relationships, as do mothers and sons, according to this rumor. I have heard that the gossip among some Shi'ites is that Baha'i religious gatherings involve group sex, that—even more astonishing—the lights are turned off and men put on the women's clothes and women put on the men's clothes!

For the sake of good order, let me emphasize that there is no evidence to support any such rumors. They seem to arise from the already ambiguous feelings which some Muslim Iranians have toward Baha'is. Together with the concept of najis, the knowledge that these and other rumors circulate may help us to understand why so many Iranians seem to accept the persecution of this law-abiding religious minority.

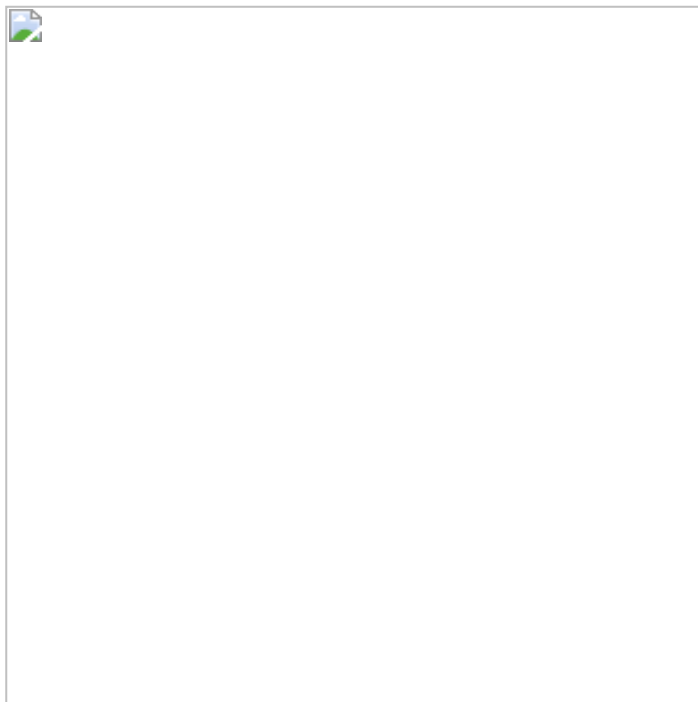
NOTES:

1. The Babi/Baha'i term for this prophet is the *man yuzhiruhu'llah*. The Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah was the *man yuzhiruhu'llah*.
2. Moojan Momen, "The Cyprus Exiles," *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* 5-6 (June 1991): 84-113.
3. *Ibid.*, 97.
4. Erik Cohen, "The Baha'i Community of Acre," *Folklore Research Center Studies* 3 (1972): 119-41.
5. Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and George Ronald, 1987), 125.
6. William P. Collins, *Bibliography of English-Language Works on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths, 1844-1985* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990), 295.
7. Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 124.
8. J. Gordon Melton, "World Union of Universal Religion and Universal Peace," *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 6th ed. (Detroit: Gale, 1999), 885.
9. Francesco Ficicchia, *Der Baha'ismus: Weltreligion der Zukunft? Geschichte, Lehre, und Organisation in kritischer Anfrage* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1981).
10. Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Desinformation als Methode: Die Bahd'ismus Monographie des F. Ficicchia*, *Religionswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien*, Band 6 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), translated into English as *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Baha'i Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).
11. Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 125.
12. Melton, "World Union," 885.
13. Robert Balch, Gwen Farnsworth, and Sue Wilkins, "When the Bombs Drop: Reactions to Disconfirmed Prophecy in a Millennial Sect," *Sociological Perspectives* 26 (1983), 137-58.
14. David Piff, personal communication, 2000.
15. Melton, "Faith of God," *op. cit.*, 883.
16. "The Policy of Prepublication Review: On Behalf of the Universal House of Justice, Enclosed with a Letter to an Individual Dated 5 October 1993," *Baha'i Studies Review* 3/2 (1993): 43-5.
17. Research Department, Baha'i World Centre, "Ethics and Methodology," *Baha'i Studies Review* 3/2 (1993): 39-42. These comments were enclosed in a letter of 3 January 1979 "to the participants in the Baha'i Studies Seminar held in Cambridge on 30 September and 1 October 1978."
18. "The Policy of Prepublication Review," *op. cit.*, 43-45; "Further Comments on Baha'i Scholarship": From a Letter on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice Dated 19 October 1993," *Baha'i Studies Review* 3/2 (1993): 46-9.
19. Two of the most detailed and important discussions of the detrimental effect of the review policy are: Denis MacEoin, "The Crisis in Babi and Baha'i Studies: Part of a Wider Crisis in Academic Freedom?" *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 17 (1990): 55-61; Juan R. I. Cole, "The Baha'i Faith in America as Panopticon, 1963-1997," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 234-48.
20. Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, "Issues Related to the Study of the Baha'i Faith," 7 April 1999.
21. Denis MacEoin, "A People Apart: The Baha'i Community of Iran in the Twentieth Century," paper 4, Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989, 27.
22. Denis MacEoin, "The Baha'is of Iran: The Roots of Controversy," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 14 (1988): 75-83.
23. A fact-oriented report on Iranian Baha'is after 1979 has been issued by the London-based Minority Rights Group. See Roger Cooper, *The Baha'is of Iran*, report no. 51 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1982). More recent facts are found in *The Baha'i Question: Iran's Secret Blueprint for the Destruction of a Religious Community; an Examination of the Persecution of the Baha'is of Iran* (New York: Baha'i International Community, 1999). The following description of persecutions is based on these reports and material from Margit Warburg, *Iranske Dokumenter: Forfølgelsen af Baha'ierne i Iran* (Copenhagen: Rhodes, 1985).
24. Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23-4.

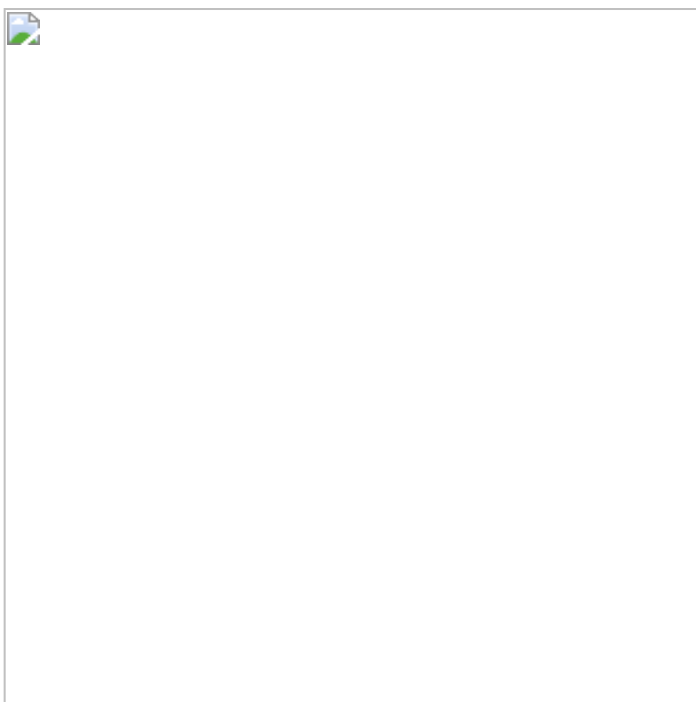
**Abdu'l Baha (1844-1921)
established the
headquarters of Baha'i on**



Mount Carmel in Haifa. His book, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, is among the canons of Bahá'í scripture. Courtesy of the Office of Public Information, Bahá'í International Community.



The International Archives Building on Mount Carmel preserves original manuscripts and artifacts, including relics of the religion and portraits of Baha'u'llah and the Bab. The dome of the shrine of the Bab is also visible. *Courtesy of Kevin Merrill, photographer and webmaster, "The Baha'í Holy Land."*

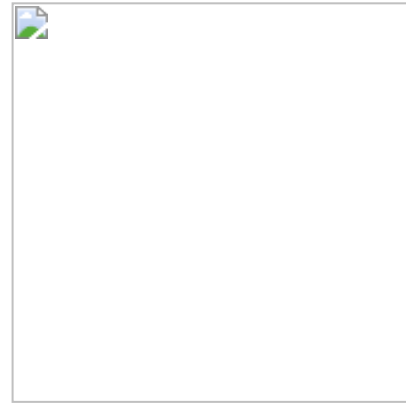


Known in India as "the lotus temple," the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi—the largest of seven temples worldwide—resembles the petals of a lotus flower. It attracts an average of 3.5 million visitors a year. *Courtesy of Francisco González Pérez, author, Arquitectos de Unidad.*

The features of the

Excerpt: Baha'i

**THE NETWORK OF THE
spacious interior of the
Baha'i House of
Worship in Wilmette,
Illinois, took thirty
years to complete.
Baha'i temples are
places of
contemplation, prayer,
and reading of
scripture. There is no
music or formal
liturgy. *Courtesy of
Francisco González
Pérez.***



**The author, Margit
Warburg, poses with a
member of the local
Baha'i National Centre in
Banjul, Gambia. The
center doubles as a tuition-
free computer school for
children, operated by an
American missionary.
*Photo by Margit Warburg,
1999.***

Copyright © Signature Books, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this text or graphics may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission from Signature Books, Inc.

| [Comparative Religion](#) |